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SUBJECT: FM LAVROV DISCUSSES MISSILE DEFENSE AND IRAN WITH
CODEL LEVIN

Classified By: Ambassador John R. Beyrle for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (S) Summary. Foreign Minister Lavrov told visiting Codel Levin April 15 that arms control issues were Russia's top priority. Noting that Moscow was waiting for concrete proposals, including specific language, from the U.S. on a post-START treaty agreement, Lavrov said he recognized that the U.S. would not want to address the link between offensive and defensive weapons in the post-START negotiations, but it would be important to have such a dialogue in the future. Russia was interested in developing a joint missile defense system (MD) with the U.S., but we should start "from scratch," with joint threat assessments, determination of necessary resources, and best location for MD assets. Lavrov rejected a quid pro quo in which the U.S. would discontinue its MD plans for eastern Europe in exchange for Russia pressuring Iran to end its nuclear weapons program, emphasizing that each issue should be considered separately. He acknowledged that Moscow was concerned about Iran's longer-range missile development and said Russia would be prepared to undertake a "dual-track" approach towards Iran's nuclear program; offering incentives to Tehran, but keeping in reserve measures within the Agreed Framework. He reconfirmed that Moscow had suspended the sale of S-300's to Iran "for the moment." In a follow-on meeting, DFM Sergey Ryabkov stressed that while Russia was interested in working with the U.S. on MD, it would be difficult for Russia to join a U.S. MD effort that included sites in Poland and the Czech Republic, and urged that if the U.S. intended to pursue sites in Europe, they should be further west and south, so as to diminish the effect on Russian capabilities. Ryabkov emphasized that "no one can deliver Iran to the U.S., except the U.S. itself," and argued that, while the S-300 sale was "frozen," the "less Moscow heard from Washington about it, the better." End summary.

¶2. (C) In a meeting with Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Moscow April 15, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Carl Levin (D-MI), together with SASC members Bill Nelson (D-FL) and Susan Collins (R-ME) emphasized that they were united in their hope that the U.S. and Russia could strengthen their cooperation to address common challenges. Noting the Senate's Constitutional role in ratifying treaties and providing advice and recommendations on foreign policy issues to the President, Senator Levin raised missile defense (MD) as an issue that had divided the two countries, but should unite them. He suggested that if Russia and the U.S. could work together on MD, it would send a powerful message to those who might threaten us, including to Iran.

¶3. (C) FM Lavrov welcomed the Senators' visit, and noted that it was timely, coming two weeks after the first meeting

between Presidents Obama and Medvedev. He highlighted the important role "Parliaments" play in building constructive relationships and expressed the hope that the U.S. and Russia could overcome the "inertia" that had characterized the relationship in the past.

Arms Control, NPT

¶4. (C) Lavrov said that arms control issues were Russia's top priority. The U.S.-Russia agenda was positive, even though we had differences. Moscow hoped the U.S. Administration would submit the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty for ratification, and would reconsider sending the "123" Agreement to the Hill. He welcomed President Obama's remarks supporting nuclear weapons reductions, saying that such reductions were not just a matter of security for the U.S. and Russia, but carried a political message that would be important for the 2010 review of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). While characterizing the elimination of nuclear weapons as "a noble goal," Lavrov said it was not "an immediate project." We needed to have some clear proposals, which would give others a clear idea of the way forward. He suggested that the next stage after the post-START negotiations should consider how to engage others, such as the UK, in discussions of further reductions, as well as looking at tactical nuclear weapons.

¶5. (C) There was "a lot to do" on non-proliferation issues, Lavrov said, including Iran and North Korea. Pakistan was a concern, and we should think about engaging them as well as India and Israel. The U.S. and Russia had cooperated to

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address the danger of non-state actors acquiring nuclear material through programs such as the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism and UN Security Council Resolution ¶1540. The U.S. and Russia should also look at ways to strengthen the NPT regime, including how to universalize the Additional Protocol. We should also work on issues like fuel supply, the Nuclear Fuel Center Russia had started, and programs like the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership.

Post-START

¶6. (C) Lavrov expressed appreciation for the Senate's confirmation of Rose Gottemoeller as A/S for VCI, noting that the U.S. and Russia had a lot of work to do to achieve a follow-on agreement to the START Treaty. The issue would be discussed at the meeting between DVBR Director Anatoliy Antonov and A/S Gottemoeller in Rome on April 24, as well as in his meeting with the Secretary in Washington in May. The teams would report to the Presidents in July, and hope to reach a framework agreement by the end of the year. He said that while the Presidents in their statement April 1 had endorsed reductions below the Moscow Treaty limits and had agreed to use many of the verification procedures of the START Treaty, Moscow was waiting for more concrete proposals from the U.S., including specific language.

¶7. (C) Lavrov highlighted the April 1 Joint Statement's reference to the link between offensive and defensive weapons, saying that the balance between the two that had existed in the Soviet Union had been thrown off kilter when the U.S. withdrew from the ABM Treaty. He stressed that he recognized this did not mean the U.S. would support addressing the linkage during the post-START negotiations, but it was important to have a discussion on it at some point in the future.

Missile Defense and Iran

¶8. (C) Senator Levin said the SASC was interested in exploring the possibility of U.S. and Russia working together

on MD. The U.S. was focused on the threat from Iran, but he recognized that Russia may have a broader perspective. However, we were both opposed to a nuclear-armed Iran, which would be able to put pressure on other countries in the region. The U.S. also perceived the possibility of an Iranian long-range missile as a threat. He noted that press reports indicated that Medvedev had told Henry Kissinger and the Hart-Hagel Commission that he was concerned that the Iranian nuclear program was more of a threat than Russia had previously believed. (Lavrov emphatically corrected this, saying Medvedev had expressed concern about Iran's missile launch). Noting that the U.S. had made commitments to Poland and the Czech Republic, Senator Levin said the U.S. would need to consider how to keep those commitments and include Europe in a common MD program with Russia.

¶9. (C) Agreeing that MD should unite the U.S. and Russia, rather than divide us, Lavrov said Russia was interested in developing a MD system with the U.S., but the U.S. proposals for an MD system in Poland and the Czech Republic ("3rd Site"), disrupted the balance between the U.S. and Russia's nuclear potential. He stressed that then-President Putin's Kennebunkport proposal for a cooperative MD effort using Russian resources, joint analyses and determinations of the threat, and data exchange centers, was still on the table. He welcomed President Obama's statement that if the Iran nuclear issue were resolved satisfactorily, there would be less need for the 3rd Site, but took care to emphasize that Russia did not support a quid pro quo between Russia helping to get Iran to end its nuclear weapons program and the U.S. discontinuing its deployment in eastern Europe. These two issues should be dealt with separately, on their own merits, Lavrov stressed.

¶10. (C) Noting that the Congressional Budget Office had presented three alternatives on the MD project, Lavrov said this showed there were issues with the proposal. Hastening to add that Russia did not endorse any of the three alternatives, Lavrov commended the Administration's intent to review them, noting this was the difference with the new Administration: it was willing to listen and take the time to analyze the alternatives, instead of saying "this is what

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must be done; everyone must say yes sir."

¶11. (C) In response to Senator's Levin question why Russia was not more concerned about Iran's missile capabilities, since Russia was closer to Iran, Lavrov said Moscow was "not complacent; we are closer." But whenever Russian negotiators had protested to the U.S. side that the proposed radar could cover Russia up to the Urals and the interceptors could reach Russian territory, the U.S. response had simply been that the system "was not aimed at Russia." As Medvedev and Putin had said, "when there is something risky on the ground, you need to take it into account." Russia had warned it would need to take countermeasures if the 3rd site was deployed, and that it would put missiles in Kaliningrad. Noting that Moscow would announce soon just how much it had withdrawn from Kaliningrad, Lavrov said he hoped the U.S. and Russia could find common ground on MD.

¶12. (C) Lavrov cautioned that Russia did not perceive Iran in the same way as the U.S. Iran for Russia was "much more than a country which might cause concern in the international community." Russia opposed Iran getting a nuclear weapon, because Russia did not want any more "members of the nuclear club," but Iran and Russia were historical and traditional partners and neighbors, with a "rich bilateral agenda." Lavrov said he was certain Iran wanted to have a full nuclear fuel cycle and would negotiate from that basis. It was unfortunate that the U.S. had not accepted the proposals a few years before when Iran only had 32 centrifuges; now they had over 5,000. Nonetheless, Russia wanted Iran to cooperate fully with the IAEA and implement, and eventually ratify, the Additional Protocol. As agreed to in the E3-plus-3

statement, Russia wanted Iran to prove the peaceful nature of its nuclear program, in a verifiable way.

¶13. (C) Lavrov commended the new U.S. approach to Iran, welcoming President Obama's readiness for the U.S. to engage "fully" in talks with Iran. Willingness to discuss "all" the issues was a welcome step, and one which Russia had been advocating for several years, Lavrov said. Iran wielded a lot of influence in the region, including on Afghanistan, Iraq, Hizbollah, Hamas, Gaza, etc. Iran had long been concerned about Israel, and saw Pakistan as a nuclear-weapons competitor. Putin had asked Ahmadinejad during a meeting in Tehran a few years before why he made such anti-Israeli statements, but Ahmadinejad had not responded, only saying that Iran was "not doing anything in the nuclear sphere different from Brazil." Putin had replied that Brazil was not in the Middle East. While Iran wanted to dominate the region and the Islamic world, which was of concern to Arab governments, the U.S. should realize that the "Arab Street" considers Iranian leaders to be heroes.

¶14. (C) Noting that Russia was watching events in Iran closely, Lavrov said Moscow would be prepared to undertake the "dual-track approach," first offering incentives to Iran, but keeping in reserve measures within the Agreed Framework. The Administration's new approach "give us a much better chance than we had in the past. We will do everything we can to make it work," Lavrov said.

¶15. (C) Senator Nelson said he was encouraged by the FM's remarks, noting that it might be possible to consider cooperating on use of Russia's radars at Gabala and Armavir. He said he hoped Lavrov was right that Iran would be deterred from building a nuclear weapon, but he was skeptical. The best deterrence might be for the U.S. and Russia to cooperate on MD.

S-300 Sales

¶16. (S) Senator Levin said that Russia had taken a practical and pragmatic step with the suspension of the sale of S-300 missiles to Iran, Senator Levin said. This helped make Israel less nervous, and sent a message to Iran that the U.S. and Russia were working more closely together on Iran issues. Lavrov acknowledged that Russia was not supplying the system "for the moment," but reiterated the usual mantra that Russia's S-300 contract with Iran did not violate any international or national laws or arms control regimes, and that the S-300's were a defensive system only. He added that nothing Russia had sold Iran had been used against anyone, whereas U.S. weapons provided to Georgia had been used

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against Russian soldiers. This did not mean the U.S. did not have the right to sell weapons to Georgia, but Moscow did not want a repeat of the August 2008 conflict. Overall, he said, the Iranians had legitimate security concerns. They had been attacked more than once by their neighbors, and saw Pakistan's nuclear status as "competition for regional leadership."

¶17. (S) In a follow-on meeting with DFM Ryabkov, Senator Levin asked whether Iran believed the S-300 sale was canceled or just suspended. Ryabkov replied that a contract existed, and it was impossible to break a contract without consequences. He repeated that Moscow had taken U.S. and Israeli concerns into account, and at present Russia was not providing any components of the system to Teheran. Thus, it was "obvious the degree to which Iran was dissatisfied with this," he said. But, the contract was not canceled, it was merely "frozen," Ryabkov stressed. He argued that "the less we hear from Washington about this, the better."

Afghanistan/Pakistan

¶18. (C) Senator Collins expressed appreciation for Russia's allowing transit of non-lethal equipment to ISAF in Afghanistan, and asked how the U.S. and Russia could work together to counter terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Lavrov said Pakistan was a place where "a lot of problems start for Afghanistan," and questioned the term "moderate Taliban." He said the people on the UNSCR 1267 Committee list should be "blacklisted for as long as possible," but for anyone else, as long as they renounced terrorism, cooperated with the Kabul government, and refrained from extremist activity, it would be all right to deal with them.

Ryabkov Meeting

¶19. (C) In a follow-up meeting with DFM Ryabkov immediately afterwards, Ryabkov cited the non-paper Lavrov had given the Secretary in the Hague on March 31, and said there was already a good basis to cooperate with the U.S. on MD. Progress had been made in the NATO Russia Council on theater missile defense, and Moscow believed there was more that could be done there. But he reiterated Lavrov's position that bilateral discussions would need to start from scratch. He disagreed with Senator Levin's statement that the system could not have a significant impact on Russia's nuclear capabilities. He noted that Russia was more concerned about the radar than the interceptor sites, because the former could see the location of Russia's strategic forces, but even with the interceptors, nobody could predict what would be at those sites in 10 years' time. In response to Senator's Levin's asking whether the deployments couldn't be limited by an agreement, Ryabkov acknowledged that was a possibility, but stressed that the radar could still be used with other U.S. MD assets. The sites in Poland and the Czech Republic were part of a global MD architecture, which, when linked together, could almost "knock Russia out."

¶20. (C) Ryabkov stressed that while the U.S. and Russia were not adversaries now, "intentions could change," whereas "capabilities" were much harder to change. He noted that the countries in eastern Europe saw the 3rd site as more of a geo-political issue, bringing them closer to the West, than as a response to a potential threat from Iran. "We are not in a zero-sum game and we do not want to use your possibly legitimate security concern as a geo-political pawn," Ryabkov argued. Noting a link to the post-START negotiations, Ryabkov said the greater the reductions in number of warheads each side could possess, the more strategically important MD became. He added that it would be politically difficult for Russia to join a U.S. MD effort that included sites in Poland and the Czech Republic. If the U.S. intended to pursue sites in Europe, they should be further west and south, so as to diminish the effect on Russian capabilities.

¶21. (C) In response to Senator Levin's question whether it would be possible to develop a joint radar system with Russian radars at Gabala, Armavir, and Moscow, connected to U.S. AEGIS and THAAD systems, Ryabkov responded that he had not considered such an idea before and would need to think about it. Such a system, he noted, would become strategic, and would lack the X-band capability of the radar proposed

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for the Czech Republic, since all the systems cited were early-warning radars only, but it could be an option.

¶22. (C) Ryabkov said Russia hoped it would be possible to have a "meaningful dialogue" with Iran, and noted that President Obama's remarks had had a strong impact in Teheran and the Arab world. But it was still difficult to predict how Teheran would react. He characterized the P5-plus 1 (E3-plus-3) statement as "very promising," but claimed experience showed Iran would not make concessions under pressure. He emphasized that it was "very clear that no one can deliver Iran to the U.S., except the U.S. itself."

Civilian Space Cooperation

¶23. (C) In response to Senator Nelson's question about prospects for increased civilian space cooperation and what would happen when the U.S. was fully dependent on the Soyuz spacecraft to reach the International Space Station, Ryabkov said he saw no difficulty with meeting the U.S.'s needs, and said we should both be forward-leaning. He noted that RosCosmos had suggested to NASA that Russia cooperate on development of the U.S.'s new spacecraft, but the idea had not been pursued. Ryabkov proposed we discuss the issue further with RosCosmos and said Moscow favored closer cooperation with the U.S. and Europe in this area. While it was not linked to MD, the more progress we could make on MD, the better able we would be to move forward on other issues.

¶24. (U) Codel Levin did not clear this cable.
BEYRLE